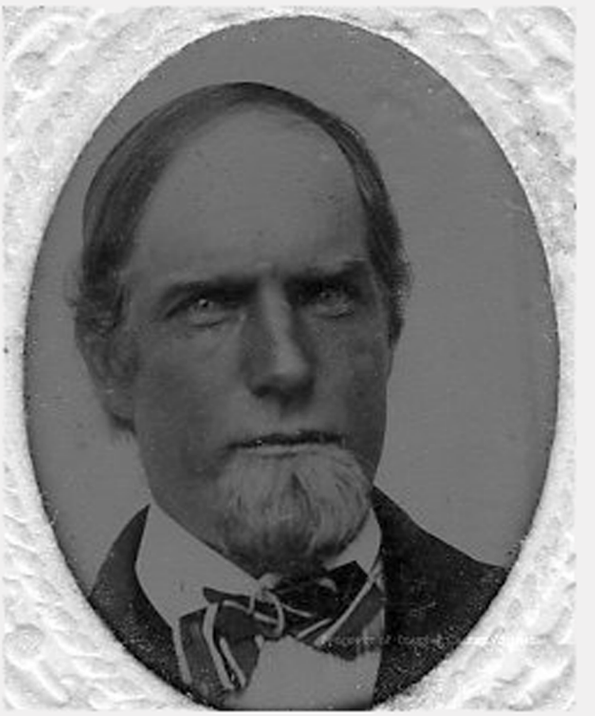
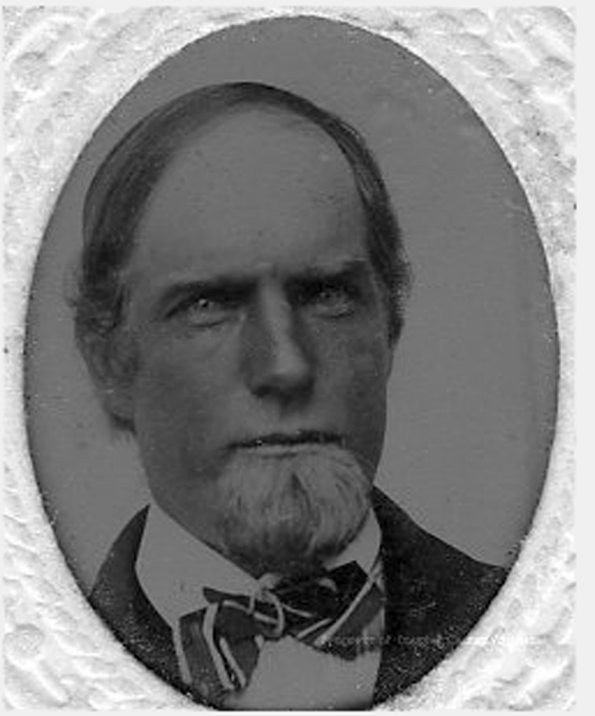




Bill Woodson with John Lewis Smith and Lewis Nolan Smith, Wells-Smith Family Album, circa 1873.

Reflections

Jeffrey Hunt
July 10 2026

The lower photograph comes from page 8 of the Wells-Smith family album. On the right is my great-grandfather John Lewis Smith, holding his son Lewis Nolan Smith, likely sometime around 1873. The man seated beside him on the left was previously unidentified.

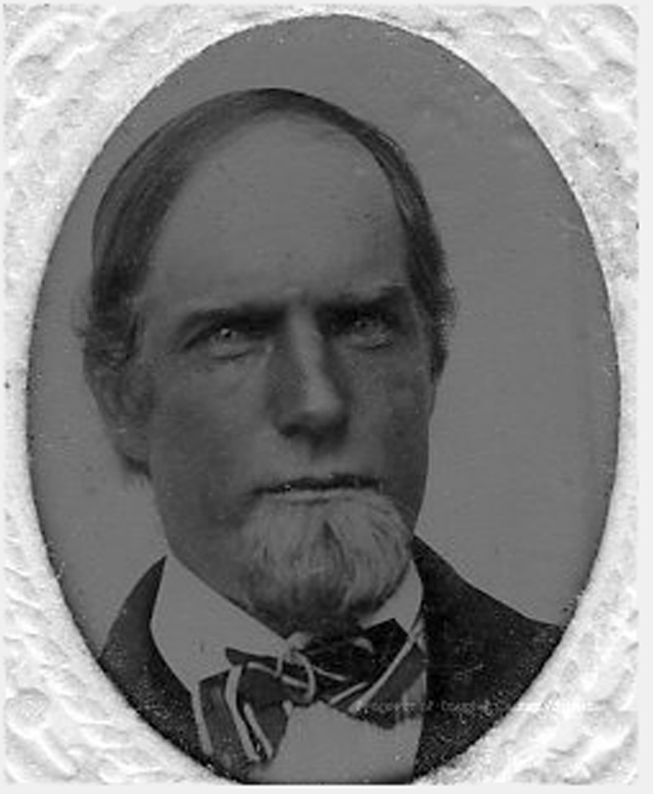
I now believe that man is Bill Woodson. The comparison image at upper right comes from the Douglas County Museum and is identified as Bill Woodson. The resemblance is clear: the same face, eyes, nose, mouth, beard pattern, age, and posture.

This identification is especially interesting because Woodson's name also appears in an 1875 Modoc War claim transfer from Oakland, Oregon, also included in these Dear Hunt archives. In that letter, W. J. Woodson sells his Modoc War claim to Abraham & Bro. of Oakland, and the transaction is witnessed by J. L. Smith — John Lewis Smith. The document does not prove that Woodson was a soldier; he may have been connected to the war through supplies, labor, animals, cooking, or other support work. But it does place Woodson and Smith together in the same Oakland business and social network. Stephen F. Chadwick, Oregon Secretary of State at the time and later governor, was also John Lewis Smith's brother-in-law.

There is also a mention of Mrs. Woodson in a family letter included in these archives, suggesting that the Woodson connection may not be limited to a single photograph or one business document. This particular Mrs. Woodson may have been a distant cousin of Bill Woodson, with possible links back to Missouri. I expect more connections to the Woodson family may emerge as the letters, album pages, and local records are compared.

That makes this photograph feel less accidental. Bill Woodson was not simply an unidentified man in an old family album. He appears to have belonged to the same circle of friends, neighbors, business associates, and pioneer families connected to John Lewis Smith in early Douglas County. There are also indications that Smith and Woodson may have been business partners, possibly connected to the ownership of Fort Umpqua, though this needs more research.

There may also be additional connections through the Woodson, Beckley, Pitzer, Smith, Young, Oakland, Yoncalla, and Rice Hill families.



Bill Woodson - Photo courtesy of Douglas County Museum